

**CONGRESSMAN BOUCHER ANNOUNCES FEDERAL FUNDING TO EXPAND
SOUTHWEST VIRGINIA EDUCATION AND TRAINING NETWORK**

\$500,000 Will Be Used to Update Local Distance Learning System

(Washington, D.C.) - U.S. Representative Rick Boucher announced today that at his request, the federal Rural Utilities Service, an agency of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, is providing a grant in the amount of \$500,000 to update and enhance the Southwest Virginia Education and Training Network (SVETN).

The federal funds will be used to upgrade the Network's digital technology capabilities enabling teachers to access a broad range of educational materials and bring new enrichment activities to their classrooms. The Network currently links state of the art electronic classrooms for distance learning in 48 Southwest Virginia schools. The new technology to be acquired with the grant will allow SVETN to function as a Virtual Private Network, permitting users to connect with classes, lectures and other information sources across the nation and around the world, assuring that all students have access to the most advanced instruction available. Students in Southwest Virginia classrooms will now be able to sit in on a lecture at NASA or view an exhibit at the Smithsonian Institute.

"By outfitting 48 schools in Lee, Scott, Wise, Dickenson, Buchanan, Russell, Washington, Smyth, Grayson, Tazwell, Bland, Wythe and Carroll County with this technology, the Network will be able to enhance academic classes, teacher training, educational video conferences, virtual field trips, cultural events, and electronic town meetings to the advantage of students and others in the community who use the network," Boucher said.

The total cost of the new equipment is \$2 million. Additional funding for this project in the amount of \$1.5 million is being provided by the Virginia Tobacco Commission.

SVETN has been operational for ten years. In just the last twelve months, the Network has served approximately 2,200 students with 107 credit courses. In addition to providing Advanced Placement courses and Dual Enrollment courses, the Network also provides professional development training for teachers and teleconferencing and training for local government officials, social services agencies and professional organizations.

"The Southwest Virginia Education and Training Network is a vital component of Southwest Virginia's educational infrastructure. The money provided today will ensure that the Network is able to grow as new technology becomes available," Boucher added.